

Chapter 10

Communication



Iams Pet Food Company

Iams Pet Food Company, the #1 dog and cat food brand in both the U.S. and Canada, holds quarterly communication meetings with its employees at all of its 11 major facilities worldwide and has been doing so since 1985—even after being acquired by Procter & Gamble in 1999. Several members of the leadership team, including the owner and the president, have attended

every one of these meetings. This method of communication helped pump the company's growth. In 1985, Iams had \$50 million in sales with 200 plus employees in three major locations. At the end of 2001, its sales were over \$800 million with more than 2,000 employees worldwide.

In 1985, Iams' human resource department performed its first employee attitude survey. The overall scores on the 21-question survey were very good. But one statement on the survey had a very low score, which caught the attention of the ownership and the leadership team. The statement was: "We do not get enough information about how well our work group and company are doing." Employees were telling management that they felt left out of the picture as the company was growing. Something was not right when it came to communication.

This was a wake up call to the ownership and leadership team because the company philosophy was built around Culture, Customers, Products, and People (CCPP). Because top management truly believed in this philosophy, they felt it was critical to improve the overall communication process in

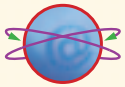
Learning Objectives

After reading Chapter 10, you should be able to:

- 1 Define communication and explain why communication by the strict chain of command is often ineffective.
- 2 Discuss barriers to effective manager-employee communication.
- 3 Explain the organizational grapevine and discuss its main features.
- 4 Review the role of verbal and nonverbal communication at work.
- 5 Discuss gender differences in communication and how they can cause communication problems.
- 6 Discuss challenges relating to cross-cultural communication and identify useful strategies to deter miscommunication.
- 7 Define computer-mediated communication and highlight its strengths and weaknesses.
- 8 Review personal strategies and organizational initiatives aimed at enhancing communication.

Iams President Jeffrey Ansell stresses excellent communication.

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the company. Management decided they needed to report information to the employees as if they were stockholders even though Iams was a privately held company.

The process they finally settled on was to hold information-sharing “Quarterly Meetings” as if their employees were indeed stockholders. How does this “Quarterly Meeting” communication process work? Iams employee quarterly meetings are held four times a year at the Home Office, R&D, the plants, and key international locations. Senior managers travel to each location and share business results, as well as other pertinent information (future plans, products, strategies, etc.). The leadership at each of the company’s locations also shares local results. This is done in a group setting with all employees attending the meeting.

The forum also allows for open dialogue between the employee audience and senior management after the presentations are completed. The meetings allow a great amount of information to be passed along in a timely manner and add to team speed. The meetings are characterized by total openness, acceptance of criticism, demand for feedback, a non-threatening atmosphere, and honest responses to open-ended questions without prefabricated answers.

Holding company-wide meetings is always a challenge. Deciding where to hold them and the best time of the week to hold them is tricky. The Iams Company uses local high school auditoriums and community centres as well as its own meeting rooms at remote locations. The best days of the week for Iams were Thursday, Friday, or Monday and the meetings are spread out over a three-week period to reach the various locations. Human Resources orchestrates the agenda, the mechanics, and the delivery. If a member of the leadership team does not know an answer, he or she is charged with finding the answer, getting back to the individual questioner, and posting it for everyone to see.

Human resource leadership can be the strategic catalyst to move this type of organizational communication forward. Creativity needs to come forward no matter what the size of the organization to make this two-way communication process become a reality. Communication technology (e.g., video-conferencing) is readily available to support the effort. But never forget the power of face-to-face contact and the importance of top management’s willingness to be there to answer the organization’s questions.¹

Iams is a shining example of the importance of good communication for organizational success. It also illustrates how employees and managers can communicate with each other and the importance of face-to-face communication.

In this chapter, we shall explore these and other aspects of communication in organizations. First, we will define communication and present a model of the communication process. We will investigate manager–employee communication, the “grapevine,” the verbal and nonverbal language of work, gender differences, cross-cultural communication, and computer-mediated communication. Finally, we will discuss personal and organizational means of improving communication.

What Is Communication?

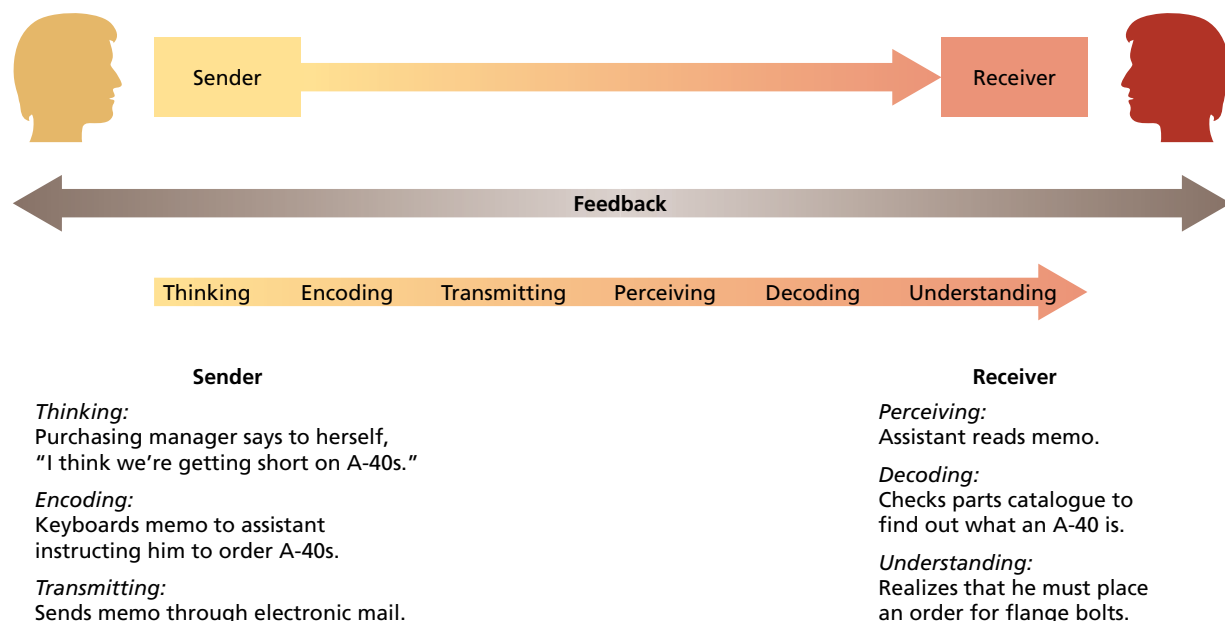
Communication is the process by which information is exchanged between a sender and a receiver. The kind of communication we are concerned with in this chapter is *interpersonal* communication—the exchange of information between people. The simplest prototype for interpersonal communication is a one-on-one exchange between two individuals. Exhibit 10.1 presents a model of the interpersonal communication process and an example of a communication episode between a purchasing manager and her assistant. As you can see, the sender must *encode* his or her thoughts into some form that can be *transmitted* to the receiver. In this case, the manager has chosen to encode her thoughts in writing and transmit them via e-mail. Alternatively, the manager could have encoded her thoughts in speech and transmitted them via voice mail or face-to-face. The assistant, as a receiver, must *perceive* the message and accurately decode it to achieve accurate understanding. In this case, the assistant uses an online parts catalogue to decode the meaning of an “A-40.” To provide *feedback*, the assistant might send the manager a copy of the order for the flange bolts. Such feedback involves yet another communication episode that tells the original sender that her assistant received and understood the message.

This simple communication model is valuable because it points out the complexity of the communication process and demonstrates a number of points at which errors can occur. Such errors lead to a lack of correspondence between the sender’s initial thoughts and the receiver’s understanding of the intended message. A

Communication. The process by which information is exchanged between a sender and a receiver.

Exhibit 10.1 A model of the communication process and an example.

Source: From Glueck, W. F. (1980). *Management* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Copyright © 1977 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.



Effective communication. The right people receive the right information in a timely manner.

slip of the finger on the keyboard can lead to improper encoding. A poor e-mail system can lead to ineffective transmission. An outdated parts catalogue can result in inaccurate decoding. As you might imagine, encoding and decoding may be prone to even more error when the message is inherently ambiguous or emotional. This is because the two parties may have very different perceptions of the “facts” at hand.

Effective communication occurs when the right people receive the right information in a timely manner. Violating any of these three conditions results in a communication episode that is ineffective.

Basics of Organizational Communication

A large-scale survey by the Families and Work Institute found that the number one factor in influencing respondents’ decision to take a job with their current employer was open communication.² Global competition, downsizing, and an increased pace of organizational change have all placed a premium on good organizational communication, and this is no doubt reflected in the survey results. Let us consider a few basic issues about organizational communication.

Communication by Strict Chain of Command

The lines on an organizational chart represent lines of authority and reporting relationships. For example, a vice-president has authority over the plant manager, who has authority over the production supervisors. Conversely, production workers report to their supervisors, who report to the plant manager, and so on. In theory, organizational communication could stick to this strict **chain of command**. Under this system, three necessary forms of communication can be accomplished.

Downward communication flows from the top of the organization toward the bottom. For example, a vice-president of production might instruct a plant manager to gear up for manufacturing a new product. In turn, the plant manager would provide specifics to supervisors, who would instruct the production workers accordingly.

Upward communication flows from the bottom of the organization toward the top. For instance, a chemical engineer might conceive a new plastic formula with unique properties. She might then pass this on to the research and development manager, who would then inform the relevant vice-president.

Horizontal communication occurs between departments or functional units, usually as a means of coordinating effort. Within a strict chain of command, such communication would flow up to and then down from a *common manager*. For example, suppose a salesperson gets an idea for a new product from a customer. To get this idea to the research staff, it would have to be transmitted up to and down from the vice-presidents of marketing and research, the common managers for these departments.

Clearly, a lot of organizational communication does follow the formal lines of authority shown on organizational charts. This is especially true for the examples of upward and downward communication given above—directives and instructions usually pass downward through the chain of command, and ideas and suggestions pass upward. However, the reality of organizational communication shows that the formal chain of command is an incomplete and sometimes ineffective path of communication.

Deficiencies in the Chain of Command

Managers recognize that sticking strictly to the chain of command is often ineffective.

Chain of command. Lines of authority and formal reporting relationships.

Downward communication. Information that flows from the top of the organization toward the bottom.

Upward communication. Information that flows from the bottom of the organization toward the top.

Horizontal communication. Information that flows between departments or functional units, usually as a means of coordinating effort.

Informal Communication. The chain of command obviously fails to consider *informal* communication between members. In previous chapters, we discussed how informal interaction helps people accomplish their jobs more effectively. Of course, not all informal communication benefits the organization. An informal grapevine might spread unsavoury, inaccurate rumours across the organization.

Filtering. Getting the right information to the right people is often inhibited by filtering. **Filtering** is the tendency for a message to be watered down or stopped altogether at some point during transmission, and it is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, employees are *supposed* to filter information. For example, presidents are not expected to communicate every detail of the management of the company clear to the shop floor. On the other side of the coin, overzealous filtering will preclude the right people from getting the right information, and the organization will suffer accordingly. Upward filtering often occurs because employees are afraid that their boss will use the information against them. Downward filtering is often due to time pressures or simple lack of attention to detail, but more sinister motives may be at work. As the old saying goes, “information is power,” and some managers filter downward communications to maintain an edge on their subordinates. For example, a manager who feels that an up-and-coming employee could be promoted over her might filter crucial information to make the subordinate look bad at a staff meeting.

Obviously, the potential for filtering increases with the number of links in the communication chain. For this reason, organizations establish channels in addition to those revealed in the formal chain of command. For instance, many managers establish an **open door policy** in which any organizational member below them can communicate directly without going through the chain.³ Such a policy should decrease the upward filtering of sensitive information if subordinates trust the system. To prevent downward filtering, many organizations attempt to communicate directly with potential receivers, bypassing the chain of command. For example, the president of a company might use the public address system to accurately inform employees about intended layoffs.

Slowness. Even when the chain of command transmits information faithfully, it can be painfully slow. The chain of command can be even slower for horizontal communication between departments, and it is not a good mechanism for reacting quickly to customer problems. Cross-functional teams and employee empowerment, concepts we introduced earlier in the text, have been used to improve communication in these areas by short-circuiting the chain of command.

In summary, informal communication and the recognition of filtering and time constraints guarantee that organizations will develop channels of communication beyond the strict chain of command.

Filtering. The tendency for a message to be watered down or stopped during transmission.

Open door policy. The opportunity for employees to communicate directly with a manager without going through the chain of command.

Manager–Employee Communication

Manager–employee communication consists of the one-to-one exchange of information between a boss and an employee. As such, it represents a key element in upward and downward communication in organizations. Ideally, such exchange should enable the boss to instruct the employee in proper task performance, clarify reward contingencies, and provide social-emotional support. In addition, it should permit the employees to ask questions about their work role and make suggestions. At Bombardier, supervisors on the shop floor meet with employees every month to discuss production issues and provide feedback.⁴

Perceptions that managers are good communicators tend to be correlated positively with organizational performance.⁵ For an example of how good manager–

employee communication can help an organization become successful, see “Applied Focus: *Taking a Walk at Home Depot*.”

How Good Is Manager-Employee Communication?

The extent to which managers and employees agree about work-related matters and are sensitive to each other’s point of view is one index of good communication. Research indicates that managers and employees often differ in their perceptions of the following issues:

- How employees should and do allocate time
- How long it takes to learn a job
- The importance employees attach to pay
- The amount of authority the employee has



Taking a Walk at Home Depot

After being fired from their executive positions at a chain of home improvement centres, Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank decided to pursue their dream: a home improvement store that would be bigger, better, and more exciting than any store of its kind. With \$2 million raised by the two partners, the first Home Depot store was opened in Atlanta in 1979. The company is now the world’s largest home-improvement retailer and the second-largest retailer in the United States. Today, there are over 1,500 Home Depot stores, 300,000 associates, and annual sales of \$58.2 billion in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

One of the most important principles that the co-founders believe has contributed to their success is communication. However, unlike most board chairs and CEOs, Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank make communication their personal business. In order to have direct contact and face-to-face interaction with the company’s store associates, the two co-founders employ a number of unique techniques that they believe are key to the dramatic growth of the company.

In order to communicate with store associates, Marcus and Blank occasionally take a “store walk.” A store walk is a visit, often unannounced, to a Home Depot store by the chair or CEO, a board member, an officer of the company, or a district manager. During these visits, they walk through the store, look at displays and signs, listen in on conversations, and talk to customers. When there are no customers around, they talk to associates, and if a customer needs help, the chairman or CEO will provide it. As well, during a store walk they will meet with 15 to 20 associates and talk about the business without the managers. Sometimes they put on

Home Depot orange aprons and work on the floor. Store walks facilitate communication from the top to the bottom of the organization and are a requirement for executives and the board of directors.

A second communication technique is called “Bernie Road Shows”; these are conducted at least eight times a year. A road show begins with a store walk with senior executives along with merchants, district managers, and officers of the division, during which time they review the merchandising philosophy and concepts. In the evening, Marcus meets with district managers and officers to exchange information and opinions. The managers have “immunity” and can ask any question without fear of negative repercussions. The next day, Marcus will study the issues and provide answers for all the questions, calling a company officer, when necessary, to get an answer. By the time the road show ends, the managers have all the answers to their questions.

Over the years, Marcus and Blank have learned a great deal from talking with associates and managers. Store walks and road shows have helped them make improvements and respond to employees’ needs and suggestions. For example, during one store walk, Marcus was introduced to a kitchen designer who was leaving the company because he did not have a retirement plan.

They talked for 45 minutes, and six months later, the company introduced an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP).

Sources: Blank, A. (1999, May 28). They sweat the small stuff. *Canadian Business*, 51–56; Kennedy, M. (1999, June 24). The sort-of-regular guys behind Home Depot. *Financial Post*, p. C8; Excerpt from Bernie Marcus, B., & Blank with Bob Andelman. *Built from Scratch: How a couple of regular guys grew the Home Depot from nothing to \$30 billion*, published by Times Books, a division of Random House.

- The employee's skills and abilities
- The employee's performance and obstacles to good performance
- The manager's leadership style.⁶

Perceptual differences like this suggest a lack of openness in communication, which might contribute to much role conflict and ambiguity, especially on the part of employees. In addition, a lack of openness in communication reduces employee job satisfaction.⁷

Barriers to Effective Manager-Employee Communication

What causes communication problems between managers and employees? In addition to basic differences in personality (Chapter 2) and perception (Chapter 3), the following factors have been implicated.

Conflicting Role Demands. In the previous chapter, we noted that the leadership role requires managers to attend to both task and social-emotional functions. That is, the boss must simultaneously direct and control the employee's work *and* be attentive to the emotional needs and desires of the employee. Many managers have difficulties balancing these two role demands. For example, consider the following memo from a sales manager to one of the company's younger sales representatives:

I would like to congratulate you on being named Sales Rep of the Month for March. You can be very proud of this achievement. I now look forward to your increased contribution to our sales efforts, and I hope you can begin to bring some new accounts into the company. After all, new accounts are the key to our success.

In congratulating the young sales rep and in suggesting that he increase his performance in the future, the manager tries to take care of social-emotional business and task business in one memo. Unfortunately, the sales rep might be greatly offended by this communication episode, feeling that it slights his achievement and implies that he has not been pulling his weight in the company. In this case, two separate communiqués, one dealing with congratulations and the other with the performance directive, would probably be more effective.

The Mum Effect. Another factor inhibiting effective manager-employee communication is the **mum effect**. This distinctive term refers to the tendency to avoid communicating unfavourable news to others.⁸ Often, people would rather “keep mum” than convey bad news that might provoke negative reactions on the part of the receiver. The sender need not be *responsible* for the bad news in order for the mum effect to occur. For instance, a structural engineer might be reluctant to tell her boss that there are cracks in the foundation of a building, even though a subcontractor was responsible for the faulty work. It should be obvious, though, that the mum effect is probably even more likely when the sender *is* responsible for the bad news. For example, the nurse who mistakenly administers an incorrect drug dose might be very reluctant to inform the head nurse of her error. Employees with strong aspirations for upward mobility are especially likely to encounter communication difficulties with their bosses.⁹ This might be due, in part, to the mum effect—employees who desire to impress their bosses to achieve a promotion have strong motives to withhold bad news.¹⁰

The mum effect does not apply only to employees. The boss might be reluctant to transmit bad news downward. In research conducted by one of your authors, it was found that employees who had good performance ratings were more likely to be informed of those ratings than employees who had bad ratings. Managers evi-

Mum effect. The tendency to avoid communicating unfavourable news to others.

dently avoided communicating bad news for which they were partly responsible, since they themselves had done the performance ratings. Given this, it is not surprising that managers and their employees often differ in their perceptions of employee performance.¹¹

The Grapevine

Just inside the gates of the steel mill where one of your authors used to work there was a large sign that read “X days without a major accident.” The sign was revised each day to impress on the workforce the importance of safe working practices. A zero posted on the sign caught one’s attention immediately, since this meant that a serious accident or fatality had just occurred. Seeing a zero on entering the mill, workers seldom took more than five minutes to find someone who knew the details. While the victim’s name might be unknown, the location and nature of the accident were always accurate, even though the mill was very large and the accident had often occurred on the previous shift. How did this information get around so quickly? It travelled through the “grapevine.”

Characteristics of the Grapevine

Grapevine. An organization’s informal communication network.

The **grapevine** is the informal communication network that exists in any organization. As such, the grapevine often cuts across formal lines of communication that are recognized by management. Observation suggests several distinguishing features of grapevine systems:

- We generally think of the grapevine as communicating information by word of mouth. However, written notes, e-mail, and fax messages can contribute to the transmission of information. For example, a fax operator in the New York office might tell the Zurich office that the chairman’s wife just had a baby.
- Organizations often have several grapevine systems, some of which may be loosely coordinated. For instance, a secretary who is part of the “office grapevine” might communicate information to a mail carrier, who passes it on to the “warehouse grapevine.”
- The grapevine can transmit information relevant to the performance of the organization as well as personal gossip.¹² Many times, it is difficult to distinguish between the two: “You won’t *believe* who just got fired!”

How accurate is the grapevine? One expert concludes that at least 75 percent of the noncontroversial organizationally related information carried by the grapevine is correct.¹³ Personal information and emotionally charged information are most likely to be distorted.

Grapevine information does not run through organizations in a neat chain in which person A tells only person B who tells only person C. Neither does it sweep across the organization like a tidal wave, with each sender telling six or seven others, who each, in turn, transmit the information to six or seven *other* members. Rather, only a proportion of those who receive grapevine news pass it on, with the net effect that more “know” than “tell.”¹⁴

Who Participates in the Grapevine?

Just who is likely to tell—that is, who is likely to be a transmitter of grapevine information? Personality characteristics may play a role. For instance, extroverts might be more likely to pass on information than introverts. Similarly, those who lack self-esteem might pass on information that gives them a personal advantage.

The nature of the information might also influence who chooses to pass it on. In a hospital, the news that a doctor has obtained a substantial cancer research grant might follow a very different path from news involving his affair with a nurse!

Finally, it is obvious that the *physical* location of organizational members is related to their opportunity to both receive and transmit news via the “vine.” Occupants of work stations that receive a lot of traffic are good candidates to be grapevine transmitters. A warm control room in a cold plant or an air-conditioned computer room in a sweltering factory might provide their occupants with a steady stream of potential receivers for juicy information. On the other side of the coin, jobs that require movement throughout the organization also give their holders much opportunity to serve as grapevine transmitters. Mail carriers and IT troubleshooters are good examples.

Pros and Cons of the Grapevine

Is the grapevine desirable from the organization’s point of view or not? For one thing, it can keep employees informed about important organizational matters, such as job security. In some organizations, management is so notoriously lax at this that the grapevine is a regular substitute for formal communication. The grapevine can also provide a test of employee reactions to proposed changes without making formal commitments. Managers have been known to “leak” ideas (such as a change to a four-day workweek) to the grapevine in order to probe their potential acceptance. Anita Roddick, the founder and managing director of The Body Shop, plants ideas with the office gossips in order to tap into the organization’s informal networks.¹⁵ Finally, participation in the grapevine can add a little interest and diversion to the work setting.

The grapevine can become a real problem for the organization when it becomes a constant pipeline for rumours. A **rumour** is an unverified belief that is in general circulation.¹⁶ The key word here is *unverified*—although it is possible for a rumour to be true, it is not likely to *remain* true as it runs through the grapevine. Because people cannot verify the information as accurate, rumours are susceptible to severe distortion as they are passed from person to person.

Rumours seem to spread fastest and farthest when the information is especially ambiguous, when the content of the rumour is important to those involved, when the rumour seems credible, and when the recipient is anxious.¹⁷

Increasingly difficult global competition, staff reductions, and restructuring have placed a premium on rumour control. At the same time, organizations should avoid the tendency to be mum about giving bad news. Federal Express used its own TV network to assure its American employees that their jobs were secure when it curtailed its European package delivery operations.

Rumour. An unverified belief that is in general circulation.

The Verbal Language of Work

A friend of one of your authors just moved into a new neighbourhood. In casual conversation with a neighbour, he mentioned that he was “writing a book on OB.” She replied with some enthusiasm, “Oh, that’s great. My husband’s in obstetrics too!” The author’s friend, of course, is a management professor who was writing a book on organizational behaviour. The neighbour’s husband was a physician who specialized in delivering babies.

Every student knows what it means to do a little “cramming in the caf” before an exam. Although this phrase might sound vaguely obscene to the uninitiated listener, it reveals how circumstances shape our language and how we often take this shaping for granted. In many jobs, occupations, and organizations we see the development of a specialized language or **jargon** that associates use to communicate with

Jargon. Specialized language used by job holders or members of particular occupations or organizations.

each other. Thus, OB means *organizational behaviour* to management professors and *obstetrics* to physicians.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in studying a large corporation, discovered its attempt to foster COMVOC, or “common vocabulary,” among its managers.¹⁸ Here, the goal was to facilitate communication among employees who were often geographically separated, unknown to each other, and “meeting” impersonally through telex or memo. COMVOC provided a common basis for interaction among virtual strangers. In addition, managers developed their own informal supplements to COMVOC. Upward mobility, an especially important topic in the corporation, was reflected in multiple labels for the same concept:

Fast trackers	One performers
High fliers	Boy (girl) wonders
Superstars	Water walkers

While jargon is an efficient means of communicating with peers and provides a touch of status to those who have mastered it, it can also serve as a *barrier* to communicating with others. For example, local jargon might serve as a barrier to clear communication between departments such as sales and engineering. New organizational members often find the use of jargon especially intimidating and confusing.

A second serious problem with the use of jargon is the communication barrier that it presents to those *outside* the organization or profession. Consider the language of the corporate takeover, with its greenmail, poison pills, and white knights! Kanter, the researcher who studied COMVOC in a large corporation, found that wives of male executives could generate a total of 103 unfamiliar terms and phrases that their husbands used in relation to work! Such a situation might contribute to a poor understanding of what the spouse does at work and how work can make such heavy demands on family life.

The Nonverbal Language of Work

Have you ever come away from a conversation having heard one thing yet believing the opposite of what was said? Professors frequently hear students say that they understand a concept but somehow know that they do not. Students often hear professors say, “Come up to my office any time,” but somehow know that they do not mean it. How can we account for these messages that we receive in spite of the words we hear? The answer is often nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication refers to the transmission of messages by some medium other than speech or writing. As indicated above, nonverbal messages can be very powerful, in that they often convey “the real stuff,” while words serve as a smoke screen. Raised eyebrows, an emphatic shrug, or an abrupt departure convey a lot of information with great economy. The minutes of dramatic meetings (or even verbatim transcripts) can make for extremely boring reading because they are stripped of nonverbal cues. These examples involve the transmission of information by the so-called body language. Below, we consider body language and the manipulation of objects as major forms of nonverbal communication.

Body Language

Body language is nonverbal communication that occurs by means of the sender’s bodily motions and facial expressions or the sender’s physical location in relation to the receiver.¹⁹ Although we can communicate a variety of information via body language, two important messages are the extent to which the sender likes and is interested in the receiver and the sender’s views concerning the relative status of the sender and the receiver.

Nonverbal communication. The transmission of messages by some medium other than speech or writing.

Body language. Nonverbal communication by means of a sender’s bodily motions, facial expressions, or physical location.

In general, senders communicate liking and interest in the receiver when they

- position themselves physically close to the receiver;
- touch the receiver during the interaction;
- maintain eye contact with the receiver;
- lean forward during the interaction; and
- direct the torso toward the receiver.²⁰

As you can see, each of these behaviours demonstrates that the sender has genuine consideration for the receiver's point of view.

Senders who feel themselves to be of higher status than the receiver act more *relaxed* than those who perceive themselves to be of lower status. Relaxation is demonstrated by

- the casual, asymmetrical placement of arms and legs;
- a reclining, nonerect seating position; and
- a lack of fidgeting and nervous activity.²¹

In other words, the greater the difference in relaxation between two parties, the more they communicate a status differential to each other.

People often attempt to use nonverbal behaviour to communicate with others, just like they use verbal behaviour. This use could include showing our true feelings, “editing” our feelings, or trying to actively deceive others. It is difficult to regulate nonverbal behaviour when we are feeling very strong emotions. However, people are otherwise pretty good at nonverbal “posing,” such as looking relaxed when they are not. On the other hand, observers also show some capacity to detect such posing.²²

One area in which research shows that body language has an impact is on the outcome of employment interview decisions. Employment interviewers are usually faced with applicants who are motivated to make a good verbal impression. Thus, in accordance with the idea that “the body doesn’t lie,” interviewers might consciously or unconsciously turn their attention to nonverbal cues on the assumption that they are less likely to be censored than verbal cues. Nonverbal behaviours, such as smiling, gesturing, and maintaining eye contact, have a favourable impact on interviewers when they are not overdone.²³ However, it is unlikely that such body language can overcome bad credentials or poor verbal performance.²⁴ Rather, increased body language might give the edge to applicants who are otherwise equally well qualified. Remember, in an employment interview, it is not just what you say, but also what you do!

Props, Artifacts, and Costumes

In addition to the use of body language, nonverbal communication can also occur through the use of various objects such as props, artifacts, and costumes.

Office Decor and Arrangement. Consider the manner in which people decorate and arrange their offices. Does this tell visitors anything about the occupant? Does it communicate any useful information? The answer is yes. One study found that students would feel more welcome and comfortable in professors’ offices when the office was (1) tidy, (2) decorated with posters and plants, and (3) the desk was against the wall instead of between the student and the professor.²⁵ A neat office evidently signalled that the professor was well organized and had time to talk to them. Perhaps personal decoration signalled, “I’m human.” When the desk was against the wall, there was no tangible barrier between the parties. Inferences of this type appear to have some validity. A recent study found that strangers were able to accurately infer certain Big Five personality traits (Chapter 2) of the occupants of

The decor and arrangement of furniture in a person's office conveys nonverbal information to visitors.

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business offices. In particular, they could assess how conscientious and how open to experience the person was simply by seeing his or her office. Neatness was a typical cue for conscientiousness and distinctive decor for openness.²⁶

Does Clothing Communicate? “Wardrobe engineer” John T. Molloy is convinced that the clothing organizational members wear sends clear signals about their competence, seriousness, and promotability—that is, receivers unconsciously attach certain stereotyped meanings to various clothing and then treat the wearer accordingly. For example, Molloy insists that a black raincoat is the kiss of death for an aspiring male executive. He claims that black raincoats signal “lower-middle class,” while beige raincoats lead to “executive” treatment both inside and outside the firm. For the same reason, Molloy strongly vetoes sweaters for women executives. Molloy stresses that proper clothing will not make up for a lack of ambition, intelligence, and savvy. Rather, he argues that the wrong clothing will prevent others from detecting these qualities. To this end, he prescribes detailed “business uniforms,” the men’s built around a conservative suit and the women’s around a skirted suit and blouse.²⁷ The rise in the number of image consultants who help aspiring executives “dress for success” testifies to the popularity of such thinking.

Research reveals that clothing does indeed communicate.²⁸ Even at the ages of 10 to 12 years, children associate various brand names of jeans with different personality characteristics of the wearer! Such effects persist into adulthood. Research simulations have shown that more masculinely dressed and groomed women are more likely to be selected for executive jobs. However, one study shows that there might be a point at which women’s dress becomes “too masculine” and thus damages their prospects.²⁹ Women’s clothing styles have been of special research interest because there is less of a consensus about just how female executives should dress.

If clothing does indeed communicate, it might do so partly because of the impact it has on the wearer’s own self-image. Proper clothing might enhance self-esteem and self-confidence to a noticeable degree. One study contrived to have some student job applicants appear for an interview in street clothes, while others had time to dress in more appropriate formal interview gear. Those who wore more formal clothes felt that they had made a better impression on the interviewer. They also asked for a starting salary that was \$4,000 higher than the job seekers who wore street clothes!³⁰

Gender Differences in Communication

Do men and women communicate differently? According to Deborah Tannen, not only are there gender differences in communication styles, but these differences influence the way that men and women are perceived and treated in the workplace. Gender differences in communication have their origin in childhood. Girls see conversations as a way to develop relationships and networks of connection and intimacy. Boys view conversations as a way for them to achieve status within groups and to maintain independence. Surprisingly, these childhood differences persist and continue in the workplace, where they influence who gets recognized and who is valued.³¹

The typical example of how these differences are played out in the workplace is in a business meeting in which a woman comes up with a great idea and by the end of the meeting one of her male peers receives the credit for it. Similarly, a woman might have a great idea for a new product but nobody pays any attention to it until a man suggests it.³² In these instances, what often happens is that a man picks up the idea of a female co-worker and spends more time talking about it. As a result, he gets heard and he gets the credit.³³

Gender differences in communication revolve around what Tannen refers to as the “One Up, One Down” position. Men tend to be more sensitive to power dynamics and will use communication as a way to position themselves in a one-up situation and avoid a one-down position. Women are more concerned with rapport building, and they communicate in ways that avoid putting others down. As a result, women often find themselves in a one-down position, which can have a negative effect on the rewards they receive and their careers.³⁴

On the basis of her research, Tannen has found that there are a number of key differences in male and female communication styles and rituals that often place women in a one-down position:

- *Getting credit.* Men are more likely to blow their horn about something good they have done, compared with women.
- *Confidence and boasting.* Men tend to be more boastful about themselves and their capabilities and to minimize their doubts, compared with women, who downplay their certainty. As a result, men tend to be perceived as more confident.
- *Asking questions.* Most people know that men do not like to ask for directions when they are lost. This is because they realize that asking questions can put them in a one-down position and reflect negatively on them. Therefore, men are less likely than women to ask questions in situations that can put them in a one-down position and threaten their independence.
- *Apologies.* Women will often say “I’m sorry” as a way of expressing concern, such as when a friend has had a bad day. For women, apologies are part of a ritual that is used to establish rapport. Men, however, avoid such ritual apologies because for them it is a sign of weakness that can place them in a one-down position.
- *Feedback.* Men and women also differ in the way they use feedback. Women will often buffer criticism by beginning with praise as a way to save face for the person receiving the criticism and avoid putting them in a one-down position. Men, however, tend to be much more blunt and straightforward. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, as when a man interprets a woman’s praise, rather than the criticism, as the main message.
- *Compliments.* If a friend of yours has just completed a class presentation and asks for your thoughts about it, what would you say? Women are more likely to provide a compliment such as “Great presentation” or “Good job.” Men, however, are more likely to interpret the question literally and provide a critique, not realizing that all that is expected is a compliment.

- *Ritual opposition.* Men often use ritual opposition or fighting as a form of communication and the exchange of ideas. This often takes the form of attacking others' points of view, challenging them in public, and being combative and argumentative. For women, this type of ritual opposition is seen as a personal attack and something to be avoided. Many women have difficulty working in such an environment and tend to come across as insecure and unable to defend their ideas.
- *Managing up and down.* Men and women differ in the way they communicate with those above and below them in the organizational chain of command. Many women believe that in order to be recognized and rewarded, what matters most is doing a good job. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. What also matters is who you communicate with and what you discuss. Men spend much more time communicating with their superiors and talking about their achievements. Not surprisingly, this type of communication influences who gets recognized and promoted. When in positions of power, women tend to downplay their superiority, leading others to believe that they are not capable of projecting their authority.
- *Indirectness.* What would be your response if your supervisor asked you a relatively simple question such as, "How would you feel about helping the human resource department hire a new person for our department?" Would you then think about how you "feel" about helping or would you interpret this as a request to actually do it? In North America, persons in positions of authority are expected to give direct orders when asking subordinates to do something. Women in positions of authority, however, tend to be indirect when giving orders. For instance, in the above example, what is really being said is, "Help the human resource department hire a person for our department." Such indirectness can lead to misunderstandings and be perceived as a lack of appropriate demeanour and confidence.³⁵

As the above examples indicate, the differences in communication styles between men and women almost always reflect negatively on women and place them in a one-down position. Does this mean that women should change the way they communicate? Not necessarily. It depends on the person they are communicating with and the situation. For example, the communication styles that women are accustomed to are most appropriate when communicating with other women, and the same goes for men. Problems and misunderstandings arise when those communicating do not understand the rituals and styles of each other. The key, according to Deborah Tannen, is to recognize that people have different linguistic styles and adopt a flexible style so that you can adjust your style, when necessary. For example, men should learn to admit when they make a mistake and women could learn to be more direct when asking subordinates to do something. Being able to use different communication styles allow people to adjust their style to any given situation.³⁶ This is not only important when considering gender differences in communication, but it is also important for effective cross-cultural communication, which is our next topic.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Consider a commonplace exchange in the world of international business:

A Japanese businessman wants to tell his Norwegian client that he is uninterested in a particular sale. To be polite, the Japanese says, "That will be very difficult." The Norwegian interprets the statement to mean that there are still unresolved problems, not that the deal is off. He responds by asking how his company can help solve the problems. The Japanese, believing he has sent the message that there will be no sale, is mystified by the response.³⁷

Obviously, ineffective communication has occurred between our international businesspeople, since the Norwegian has not received the right information about the (non)sale. From the Norwegian's point of view, the Japanese has not encoded his message in a clear manner. The Japanese, on the other hand, might criticize the weak decoding skills of his Scandinavian client. Thus, we see that problems in communication across cultures go right to the heart of the communication model that we studied at the beginning of the chapter.

In Chapter 4, we learned that various societies differ in their underlying value systems. In turn, these differences lead to divergent attitudes about a whole host of matters ranging from what it means to be on time for a meeting to how to say “no” to a business deal (as illustrated above). In Chapter 4, we also noted that a surprising number of managers do not work out well in international assignments. Many of these failures stem from problems in cross-cultural communication. Let us examine some important dimensions of such communication.

Language Differences

Communication is generally better between individuals or groups who share similar cultural values. This is all the more so when they share a common language. Thus, despite acknowledged differences in terminology (“lift” versus “elevator,” “petrol” versus “gasoline”), language should not be a communication barrier for the North American executive who is posted to a British subsidiary. Despite this generality, the role of language in communication involves some subtle ironies. For example, a common language can sometimes cause visitors to misunderstand or be surprised by legitimate cultural differences because they get lulled into complacency. Boarding a Qantas Airlines flight in Australia, one of your authors was attempting to pick up a magazine from a rack in the 747 when he was admonished by a flight attendant with the sharp words “First class, mate.” Grinning sheepishly, he headed back to his tourist class seat without the magazine. Wise to the ways of Australia, he was not offended by this display of brash informality. However, a less familiar North American, assuming that “they speak English, they’re just like us,” might have been less forgiving, attributing the flight attendant’s behaviour to a rude personality rather than national style. By the same token, the flight attendant would be surprised to learn that someone might be offended by his words.

As the Qantas example indicates, speaking the same language is no guarantee of perfect communication. In fact, the Norwegian and Japanese businesspeople described above might have negotiated in a common language, such as English. Even then, the Norwegian did not get the message. Speaking generally, however, learning a second language should facilitate cross-cultural communication. This is especially true when the second-language facility provides extra insight into the communication style of the other culture. Thus, the Norwegian would profit from understanding that the Japanese have sixteen subtle ways to say no, even if he could not understand the language perfectly.³⁸ Even though Americans are notoriously adverse to learning a second language, many executives seem to be getting the message in the face of the increasing globalization of business. Although the language of international business is surely gravitating toward English, learning the second language should provide better insight into the nuances of a business associate’s culture.

Nonverbal Communication Across Cultures

From our earlier discussion of nonverbal communication, you might be tempted to assume that it would hold up better than verbal communication across cultures. While there are some similarities across cultures in nonverbal communication, there are also many differences. Here are a few examples.

- *Facial expressions.* People are very good at decoding basic, simple emotions in facial expressions, even across cultures. Americans, Japanese, and members of primitive New Guinea tribes can accurately detect anger, surprise, fear, and sadness in the same set of facial photographs.³⁹ Thus, paying particular attention to the face in cross-cultural encounters will often yield communication dividends. However, this does not always work because some cultures (such as that of Japan) frown on the display of negative facial expressions, no doubt prompting the “inscrutable” label.
- *Gestures.* Except for literal mimicry (“I need food,” “Sign here”), gestures do not translate well across cultures. This is because they involve symbolism that is not shared. Most amusing are those cases in which the same gesture has different meanings across cultures:

In the United States, a raised thumb is used as a signal of approval or approbation, the “thumbs up” signal, but in Greece, it is employed as an insult, often being associated with the expression “katsa pano” or “sit on this.” Another example is the ring sign, performed by bringing the tips of the thumb and finger together so that they form a circle. For most English-speaking people it means O.K. and is, in fact, known as the “O.K. gesture.” But in some sections of France, the ring means zero or worthless. In English-speaking countries, disagreement is signalled by shaking the head, but in Greece and southern Italy the head-toss is employed to signify “no.”⁴⁰

- *Gaze.* There are considerable cross-cultural differences in the extent to which it is considered suitable to look others directly in the eye. Latin Americans and Arabs favour an extended gaze, while Europeans do not. In many parts of East Asia, avoiding eye contact is a means of showing respect. In North America, it often connotes disrespect.
- *Touch.* In some cultures, people tend to stand close to one another when meeting and often touch each other as an adjunct to conversation. This is common in Arab, Latin American, and South European countries. On the other hand, North Europeans and North Americans prefer to “keep their distance.”⁴¹

In an interesting experiment on nonverbal cross-cultural communication, English people received training in social skills that were appropriate to the Arab world. These included standing or sitting close to others and looking into their eyes, coupled with extensive touching, smiling, and handshaking. Experimenters then introduced Arabs to a trained subject and to a control subject who had only been exposed to general information about the Middle East. When asked whom they liked better, the Arabs preferred the people who had received training in their own nonverbal communication style.⁴² We can well imagine a business meeting between English and Saudi bankers, both true to their cultures. The Saudis, gazing and touching, finish the meeting wondering why the English are so inattentive and aloof. The English, avoiding eye contact and shrinking from touch, wonder why the Saudis are so aggressive and threatening!

Etiquette and Politeness Across Cultures

Cultures differ considerably in how etiquette and politeness are expressed.⁴³ Very often, this involves saying things that one does not literally mean. The problem is that the exact form that this takes varies across cultures, and careful decoding is necessary to avoid confusion and embarrassment. Literal decoding will almost always lead to trouble. Consider the North American manager who says to an employee, “Would you like to calculate those figures for me?” This is really a mild order, not an opportunity to say no to the boss’s “invitation.” However, put yourself in the

place of a foreign employee who has learned that Americans generally speak directly and expect directness in return. Should she say no to the boss?

In some cultures, politeness is expressed with modesty that seems excessive to North Americans. Consider, for example, the Chinese visitor's response to a Canadian who told him that his wife was very attractive. The Chinese modestly responded, "No, no, my wife is ugly." Needless to say, what was said was not what was meant.

In social situations, the Japanese are particularly interested in maintaining feelings of interdependence and harmony. To do this, they use a large number of set phrases or "lubricant expressions" to express sympathy and understanding, soften rejection, say no indirectly, or facilitate apology.⁴⁴ To North Europeans and North Americans, who do not understand the purpose of these ritual expressions, they seem at best to be small talk and at worst to be insincere.

Social Conventions Across Cultures

Over and above the issue of politeness and etiquette, there are a number of social conventions that vary across cultures and can lead to communication problems.⁴⁵ We have already alluded to the issue of directness. Especially in business dealings, North Americans tend to favour "getting down to brass tacks" and being specific about the issue at hand. Thus, the uninitiated businessperson might be quite surprised at the rather long period of informal chat that will begin business meetings in the Arab world or the indirectness and vagueness of many Japanese negotiators.

Greetings and how people say hello also vary across cultures and these differences can lead to misunderstandings (Exhibit 10.2). For example, in North America people often greet one another by asking "How are you?" and yet seem uninterested in the response. While this is an acceptable way of saying hello to North Americans, visitors from other cultures find this to be hypocritical. In other cultures, people greet each other by asking, "Where are you going?" Such a question is considered intrusive to North Americans who do not realize that this too is just a way of greeting somebody.⁴⁶

What individuals consider a proper degree of loudness for speech also varies across cultures, and people from "quieter" societies (such as the United Kingdom) might unfairly view those from "louder" societies (such as the Middle East) as pushy or intimidating.

Greetings from Around the World: Cultural Differences in Saying "Hello"

<i>Culture</i>	<i>Description</i>
Japan	The bow—bending forward and down at the waist.
India	<i>Namaste</i> —placing hands at the chest in a praying position and bowing slightly.
Thailand	Wai—same as namaste (India).
Middle East	<i>Salaam</i> —used primarily among the older generation. Right hand moves upward, touching first the heart, then the forehead, and then moving up into the air.
Maori tribespeople (New Zealand) and Eskimos	Rubbing noses.
East African tribes	Spitting at each other's feet.
Tibetan tribesmen	Sticking out their tongues at each other.
Bolivia	Handshake accompanied by a hearty clap on the back.
Russia	Friends begin with a handshake and move to a "bear hug."
Latin America	<i>Abrazo</i> —embracing with both arms.

Exhibit 10.2

Greetings from around the world: cultural differences in saying "hello."

Source: Data from Axtell, R. E. (1991). *Gestures: The do's and taboos of body language around the world*. New York: Wiley.

What people consider proper punctuality also varies greatly around the world. In North America and Japan, punctuality at meetings and social engagements is expected and esteemed. In the Arab world and Latin America, being late for a meeting is not viewed negatively. In fact, one study found that being on time for an appointment connoted success in the United States and being *late* connoted success in Brazil.⁴⁷ Notice how an American businessperson might decode a Brazilian's lateness as disrespect, while the Brazilian was just trying to make a proper impression.

Exhibit 10.3 shows the results of a study of differences in the pace of life across cultures. It illustrates the accuracy of clocks, the time to walk 100 feet, and the time to get served in a post office. As you can see, Japan is the most time conscious, while Indonesia is quite leisurely. Such differences are especially likely to provoke communication problems when we attribute them to a *person* and ignore the overall influence of the culture.

Finally, nepotism, favouring one's relatives in spite of their qualifications, is generally frowned on in more individualistic societies, such as North America and North Europe. However, in more collective cultures, such as those found in Africa and Latin America, people are expected to help their relatives. Hence, an American manager might view his Nigerian colleague's hiring his own son as irresponsible. The Nigerian might see it as irresponsible *not* to hire his own flesh and blood.

Cultural Context

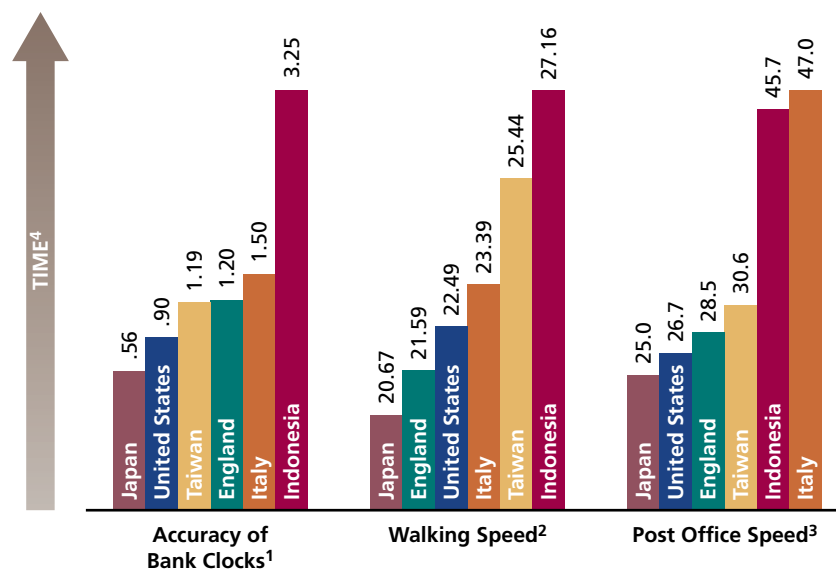
In the previous sections, we provided many examples of communication differences across cultures. Is there some organizing principle underlying these differences, something that helps to summarize them? The concept of *cultural context* provides a partial answer. **Cultural context** is the cultural information that surrounds a communication episode. It is safe to say that context is always important in accurately decoding a message. Still, as Exhibit 10.4 shows, cultures tend to differ in the importance to which context influences the meaning to be put on communications.⁴⁸

Some cultures, including many East Asian, Latin American, African, and Arab cultures, are high-context cultures. This means that the message contained in communication is strongly influenced by the context in which the message is sent. In

Cultural context. The cultural information that surrounds a communication episode.

Exhibit 10.3
Pace of life in six countries.

Source: Levine, R., & Wolff, E. (1985, March). Social time: The heartbeat of culture. *Psychology Today*, 28–35.



¹ Deviations are reported in minutes

^{2,3} Speeds are in seconds

⁴ Smaller numbers indicate more accurate clocks, faster walking speeds, and faster office speeds, respectively

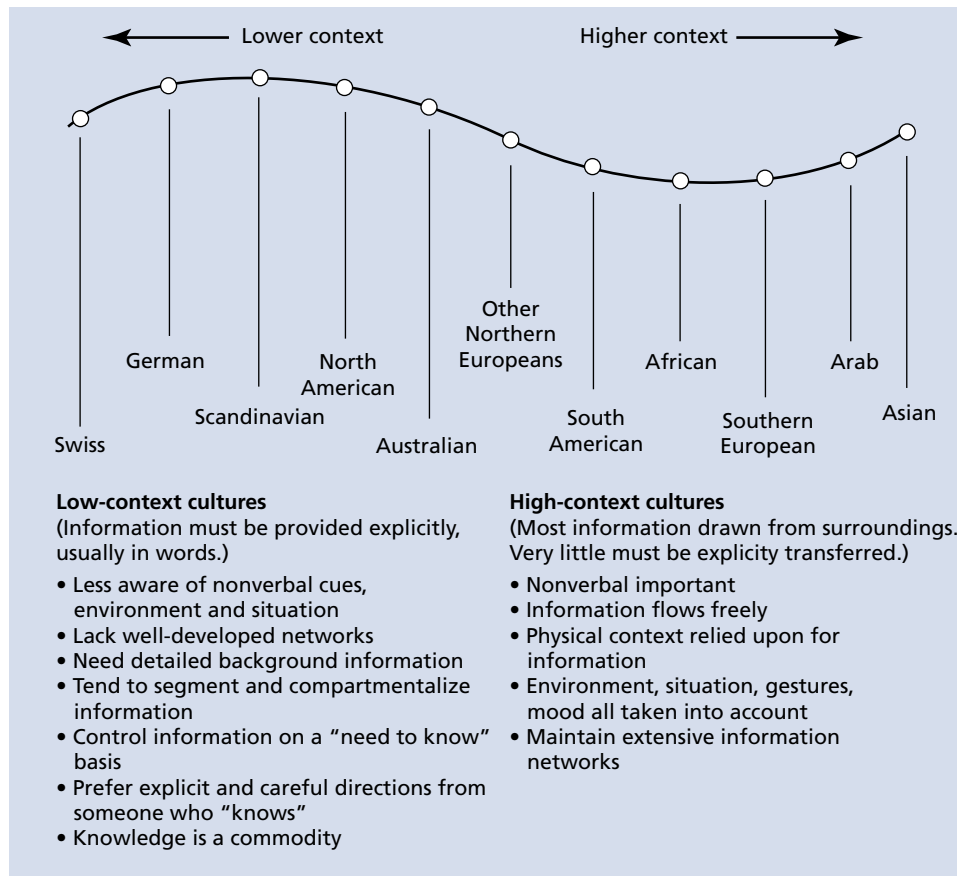


Exhibit 10.4
High- versus low-context cultures.

Source: Klopff, D. W. (1995). *Intercultural encounters: The fundamentals of intercultural communication*, p. 33. Englewood, Colorado: Morton Publishing Company.

high-context cultures, literal interpretations are often incorrect. Examples include those mentioned earlier—the Japanese really meant that the business deal was dead, and the Chinese did not really mean that his wife was unattractive.

Low-context cultures include North America, Australia, Northern Europe (excluding France), and Scandinavia. Here, messages can be interpreted more literally because more meaning resides in the message than in the context in which the communication occurs. The “straight talk” that Americans favour is such an example. However, such straight talk is not any straighter in meaning than that heard in high-context cultures if one also learns to attend to the context when decoding messages.

Differences in the importance of context across cultures have some interesting implications for organizational communication, especially when we consider what might occur during business negotiations. Consider the following:⁴⁹

- People from high-context cultures want to know about you and the company that you represent in great detail. This personal and organizational information provides a context for understanding your messages to them.
- Getting to the point quickly is not a style of communication that people in high-context cultures favour. Longer presentations and meetings allow people to get to know one another and to consider a proposal in a series of stages.
- When communicating with people from a high-context culture, give careful consideration to the age and rank of the communicator. Age and seniority tend to be valued in high-context cultures, and the status of the communicator is an important contextual factor that gives credibility to a message. Younger fast trackers will do fine in low-context cultures where “it’s the message that counts.”

- Because they tend to devalue cultural context, people from low-context cultures tend to favour very detailed business contracts. For them, the meaning is in the message itself. High-context cultures place less emphasis on lengthy contracts because the context in which the deal is sealed is critical.

Some more general advice for good cross-cultural communication will be presented shortly, but for now, consider the You Be the Manager feature about cross-cultural communication when a company expands to a new country, as was the case when Four Seasons took over one of Paris's most renowned hotels.

Computer-Mediated Communication

Does communicating electronically differ from face-to-face communication? This is clearly an important topic given the pervasive use of routine e-mail, “chat” type decision support software, tele-conferencing, video-conferencing, and other electronic communication media. A good way to begin thinking about this issue is to consider **information richness**, the potential information-carrying capacity of a communication medium.⁵⁰ As you can see in Exhibit 10.5, we can rank order various media in terms of their information richness. A face-to-face transmission of information is very high in richness because the sender is personally present, audio and visual channels are used, body language and verbal language are occurring, and feedback to the sender is immediate and ongoing. At Iams, management recognized that face-to-face meetings were the best way to communicate with their employees, in keeping with the firm's corporate culture. A telephone conversation is also fairly rich, but it is limited to the audio channel, and it does not permit the observation of body language. At the other extreme, communicating via numeric computer output lacks richness because it is impersonal and uses only numeric language. Feedback on such communication might also be very slow.

Exhibit 10.6 on page 328 shows two important dimensions of information richness: the degree to which information is synchronous between senders and receivers, and the extent to which both parties can receive nonverbal and paraverbal cues. Highly synchronous communication, such as face-to-face speech, is two-way, in real time. On the low side of synchronization, memos, letters, and even e-mails are essentially a series of one-way messages, although e-mail has the clear potential for speedy response. Face-to-face interaction and video-conferencing are high in nonverbal (e.g., body language) and paraverbal (e.g., tone of voice) cues, while these are essentially absent in the text-based media. In general, the media in the upper right

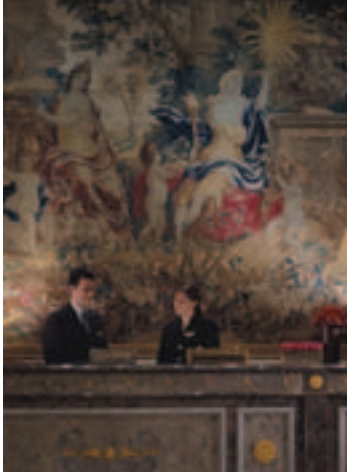
Information richness. The potential information-carrying capacity of a communication medium.

Exhibit 10.5
Communication media and information richness.

Source: Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organization design. *Research in organizational behavior*, 6, 191–233, p. 196. Reprinted by permission of JAI Press, Inc.

Information Medium	Information Richness
Face to Face	Highest
Telephone	High
Written, Personal (letters, memos)	Moderate
Written, Formal (bulletins, documents)	Low
Numeric Formal (computer output)	Lowest

You Be the Manager



The George V balances Four Seasons corporate culture with French national culture.

Four Seasons Goes to Paris

the service” of another, but honourable to “give service” if it is deserved. This view was quite different from the values espoused at Four Seasons. Furthermore, while Four Seasons believed in individual initiative with accountability, and strong cooperation between managers and employees, the French have traditionally had adversarial relationships with their superiors, and were not known for taking initiative without checking with higher-ups. Four Seasons’ task of communicating and implementing its corporate culture was all the more daunting given France’s strong labour laws, which forced the company to retain all the previous employees of the hotel who wished to return, and France’s experiences with other North American firms, such as Disney, which showed little cultural sensitivity when it came to Europe and earned the resentment and ridicule of the French.

Four Seasons played up its Canadian identity to emphasize its open-mindedness to different national cultures, and appointed Didier Le Calvez, a native of France who had spent the last 25 years working outside of the country. As general manager of the Four Seasons Hotel George V, Le Calvez and his team knew that “Four Seasonizing” the hotel would be no easy task.

In 2003, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts managed 60 properties in 28 countries and was widely regarded as the world’s leading operator of luxury hotels. The Canadian company, for the seventh year in a row, was among *Fortune*’s list of the top 100 best companies to work for in North America, and had seen impressive financial results over the same period. An important source of Four Seasons’ competitive advantage is its strong organizational culture based on the Golden Rule of “treating others as you wish they would treat you.” The culture is supported by a philosophy focusing on modesty, individual accountability, a strong allegiance to the firm, global service standards, and intelligent, anticipatory, and enthusiastic service delivery. While the culture at Four Seasons has been viewed as a cornerstone of its success, its international expansion begged the question: How do you communicate a corporate culture to employees in different countries? This question appeared particularly important when Four Seasons took over the operation of one of Paris’s most revered and storied hotels, the George V.

The George V is one of six grand, historic, and luxurious hotels in Paris classified as “Palaces.” In the 1980s and 1990s, however, some began to suggest that the hotel was not living up to its lofty reputation. After the hotel was sold in December 1996, Four Seasons signed a long term deal to manage the hotel. While Paris is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, the French have a distinct national culture and a particular philosophy of customer service where it is degrading to be “in

Questions

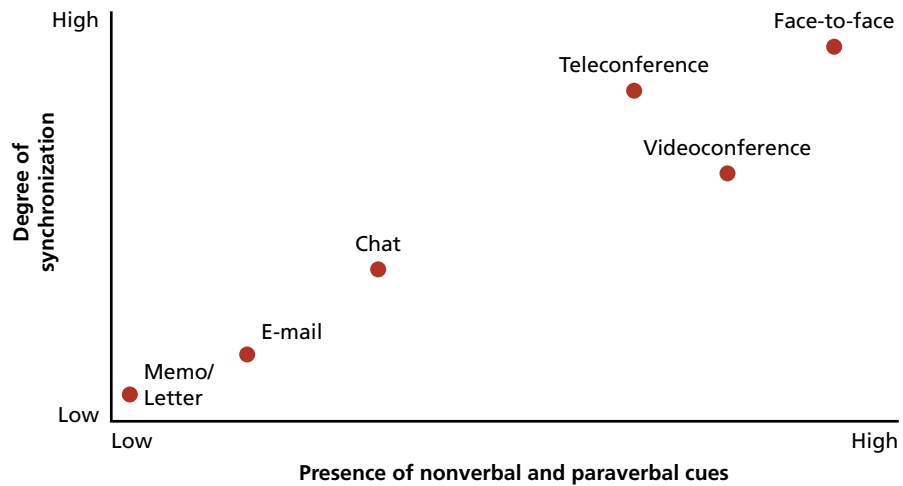
1. Given Four Seasons’ operations in 24 different countries, what important factors must the firm’s managers be aware of in order to properly communicate with staff at their hotels? Should all policies and procedures be communicated and implemented universally?
2. Considering France’s national culture, and the fact that the George V had been acquired and is now being operated by foreign interests, what specific tactics could Mr. Le Calvez use to communicate Four Seasons’ culture and approach to employees, and to the French public?

To find out what Four Seasons did, see The Manager’s Notebook at the end of the chapter.

Source: Adapted (with updates) from Hallowell, R., Bowen, D. E., & Knoop, C. I. (2002, November). Four Seasons goes to Paris. *Academy of Management Executive*, 7–24. Reprinted with permission.

Exhibit 10.6
Communication media
arranged according to
synchronization and cue
availability.

Source: Baltes, B. B., Dickson, M. W., Sherman, M. P., Bauer, C.C., & LaGanke, J. S. (2002). Computer-mediated communication and group decision making: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 87, 156–179.



sector of Exhibit 10.6 (highly synchronous, high in nonverbal and paraverbal cues) exemplify the most information richness and those in the lower left sector exhibit the least richness.

As shown in Exhibit 10.6, e-mail, chat systems, tele-conferencing, and video-conferencing are commonly classified as **computer-mediated communication (CMC)** in that they rely on computer technology to facilitate information exchange. All of these media permit discussion and decision making without employees having to be in the same location, potentially saving time, money, and travel hassles. But does such potential efficiency result in effective communication, as we defined it earlier?

Computer-mediated communication (CMC). Communication that relies on computer technology to facilitate information exchange.

Computer-mediated communication includes videoconferencing.

Omitted Due to
Copyright Restrictions

Although e-mail is by far the most used form of computer-mediated communication, there has been little rigorous research concerning its impact. Rather, most research has focused on “chat” type group decision support systems that rely on text-based computer conferencing to generate ideas and make decisions. Such systems have been shown to enhance the sheer number of ideas regarding some problem generated under “brainstorming” conditions (Chapter 11).⁵¹ Several factors contribute to this. In electronic groups, computer memory means that people can “talk” at the same time. Also, some systems permit the anonymous generation of ideas. This means that those who are shy may be less inhibited in offering suggestions. Also, anonymity can erase perceived or actual status differences. In one study of executives, men were five times more likely than women to offer an initial idea in a face-to-face meeting. In an electronic meeting, men and women were equally likely to offer the first idea.⁵²

By almost any criterion other than generating ideas, computer-mediated groups perform more poorly than face-to-face groups. One careful review concluded:

Our results suggest that computer-mediated decision-making groups are rarely if ever more effective than face-to-face groups, that CMC group members are rarely if ever more satisfied than members of face-to-face groups, and that CMC groups rarely if ever take less time than face-to-face groups. At best, CMC groups are not significantly worse than face-to-face groups, and even these results occur only in very unusual and uncommon organizational conditions [such as when members are anonymous].⁵³

What accounts for this poor performance for computer-mediated communication? Difficulty in building trust may be one factor, a point we noted in Chapter 7 with reference to virtual teams. Some observers have noted that the detachment of electronic communication can give rise to rude, impulsive messages and to the expression of extreme views, sometimes called “flaming.” Others have noted that electronic media elicit informal modes of expression that are prone to misinterpretation. The consequent use of emotional icons (“emoticons”) such as the smiley face

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can only go so far as trust builders.⁵⁴ In addition, the lack of nonverbal cues may make it difficult to recognize subtle trends toward consensus. Finally, although computer mediation can reduce status differences and promote equality, people can still detect some differences in text-based messages. For instance, people exhibit some degree of accuracy in deducing whether a message was sent by a man or a woman!⁵⁵

It should be noted that preferences for CMC may vary among individuals and organizations. For instance, younger men seem most favourably inclined, though experience with CMC can erase gender and age differences in preference. Also, some industries and organizational cultures seem more inclined toward CMC, with hi-tech firms leading the way.

To summarize, a good rule to follow is that less routine communication requires richer communication media.⁵⁶ Memos, reports, and e-mails are fine for recurrent noncontroversial, impersonal communication in which information is merely being disseminated. Important decisions, news, intended changes, controversial messages, and emotional issues generally call for richer (i.e., face-to-face or video) media. For example, see “Research Focus: *Explaining Controversial Policies*.”

Personal Approaches to Improving Communication

What can you do to improve your own ability to communicate better with your boss, your subordinates, your peers, as well as customers, clients, or suppliers?

RESEARCH FOCUS

Explaining Controversial Policies

Organizations sometimes have to enact controversial policies that have the potential to spark much employee resistance. Examples might involve restructuring, layoffs, pay rollbacks, smoking bans, or affirmative action programs. Often, there are good business or social reasons for the introduction of such policies. However, in line with the mum effect, many organizations simply announce such policies with little or no explanation, evidently fearing to dwell on negative news or provoke lawsuits. Research shows that this is a bad idea, and there are communication approaches that can greatly improve the perceived fairness of controversial policies. Notions of procedural fairness (Chapter 4) underlie such effective communication.

Two factors are critical to the perceived fairness of controversial policies: the adequacy of the explanation and the style with which it is delivered. Adequate explanations are specific and detailed, highlighting the reasons for the policy, how the decision was made, and the benefits that will accrue from it. Equally important, the delivery of the message should be truthful, sincere, respectful, and sen-

sitive. When appropriate, the communicator should express sincere remorse for having to implement the policy (e.g., a pay rollback) and acknowledge any suffering that the policy might cause. Needless to say, all of this requires the use of a rich communication medium, such as a personal appearance by the CEO or other high organizational representative. A research review by John Shaw and colleagues concluded that an adequate explanation for a policy decision reduced employees' tendencies to retaliate by 43 percent. It also concluded that an inadequate explanation is seen as less fair than no explanation at all.

Sources: Bobocel, D. R., McCline, R. L., & Folger, R. (1997). Letting them down gently: Conceptual advances in explaining controversial organizational policies. In C. L. Cooper & D. M. Rousseau (Eds.), *Trends in organizational behavior* (Vol. 4), Chichester, UK: Wiley; Greenberg, J., & Lind, E. A. (2000). The pursuit of organizational justice: From conceptualization to implication to application. In C. L. Cooper & E. A. Locke (Eds.), *Industrial and organizational psychology: Linking theory with practice*, Oxford: Blackwell; Shaw, J. C., Wild, E., & Colquitt, J. A. (2003). To justify or excuse?: A meta-analytic review of the effects of explanations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 444–458.

Good question. More and more people are learning that developing their communication skills is just as sensible as developing their accounting skills, their computer skills, or anything else that will give them an edge in the job market.

Improvements in communication skills are very reinforcing. When you communicate well, people generally respond to you in a positive way, even if they are not totally happy with your message. Poor communication can provoke a negative response that is self-perpetuating, in that it leads to even *poorer* communication. This happens when the other party becomes resistant, defensive, deceptive, or hostile.

Basic Principles of Effective Communication

Let us consider some basic principles of effective face-to-face communication.⁵⁷ These principles are basic, in that they apply to upward, downward, horizontal, and outside communication. They generally apply to cross-cultural encounters, as long as they are applied in conjunction with the advice in the following section, “When in Rome....”

Take the Time. Good communication takes time. Managers, in particular, need to devote extra effort to developing good rapport with employees. Not taking adequate time often leads to the selection of the wrong communication medium. One of your authors has seen a “don’t do this” memo sent to 130 employees because two of them committed some offence. Of course, the memo irritated 128 people and the two offenders really did not grasp the problem. The boss should have taken the time to meet face-to-face with the two people in question. In the case of Iams, managers understood that getting your message across and communicating with employees requires time and effort. The rewards, however, can be huge.

Be Accepting of the Other Person. Try to be accepting of the other person as an individual who has the right to have feelings and perceptions that may differ from your own. You can accept the person even if you are unhappy with something that he or she has done. Having empathy with others (trying to put yourself in their place and see things from their perspective) will increase your acceptance of them. Acting superior or arrogant works against acceptance.

Do Not Confuse the Person with the Problem. Although you should be accepting of others, it is generally useful to be problem oriented rather than person oriented. For example, suppose an employee does something that you think might have offended a client. It is probably better to focus on this view of the problem than to impute motives to the employee (“Don’t you care about the client’s needs?”). The focus should be on what the person did, not who the person is. Along these same lines, try to be more descriptive rather than evaluative. Again, focus on what exactly the employee did to the client, not how bad the consequences are.

Say What You Feel. More specifically, be sure that your words, thoughts, feelings, and actions exhibit **congruence**—that they all contain the same message. A common problem is soft-peddling bad news, such as saying that someone’s job is probably secure when you feel that it probably is not. However, congruence can also be a problem with positive messages. Some managers find it notoriously difficult to praise excellent work or even to reinforce routine good performance. Congruence can be thought of as honesty or authenticity, but you should not confuse it with brutal frankness or cruelty. Also, remember that in some high-context cultures, “saying what you feel” is done very indirectly. Still, the words and feelings are congruent in their own context.

Listen Actively. Effective communication requires good listening. People who are preoccupied with themselves or who simply hear what they expect to hear are not good listeners. Good listening improves the accuracy of your reception, but it also shows acceptance of the speaker and encourages self-reflection on his or her part. Developing good listening skills can be harder than acquiring good speaking skills. Good listening is not a passive process. Rather, good communicators employ active listening to get the most out of an interaction. Techniques of **active listening** include the following:

- *Watch your body language.* Sit up, lean forward, and maintain eye contact with the speaker. This shows that you are paying attention and are interested in what the speaker is saying (this is another aspect of congruence).
- *Paraphrase what the speaker means.* Reflecting back what the speaker has said shows interest and ensures that you have received the correct message.
- *Show empathy.* When appropriate, show that you understand the feelings that the speaker is trying to convey. A phrase such as “Yes, that client has irritated me, too” might fill the bill.
- *Ask questions.* Have people repeat, clarify, or elaborate what they are saying. Avoid asking leading questions that are designed to pursue some agenda that you have.
- *Wait out pauses.* Do not feel pressured to talk when the speaker goes silent. This discourages him or her from elaborating.

The San Francisco Police Department has trained several hundred officers in active listening as part of its peer support program to deal with work stress.⁵⁸

Give Timely and Specific Feedback. When you initiate communication to provide others with feedback about their behaviour, do it soon and be explicit. Speed maximizes the reinforcement potential of the message, and explicitness maximizes

Congruence. A condition in which a person’s words, thoughts, feelings, and actions all contain the same message.

Active listening. A technique for improving the accuracy of information reception by paying close attention to the sender.

its usefulness to the recipient. Say *what* was good about the person's presentation to the client, and say it soon.

When in Rome...

Frankly, you are off to a pretty good start in cross-cultural communication if you can do a careful job of applying the basic communication principles we discussed above. However, people's basic skills sometimes actually *deteriorate* when they get nervous about a cross-cultural encounter. Let us cover a few more principles for those situations.

Assume Differences Until You Know Otherwise. The material we presented earlier on cross-cultural communication and that in Chapter 3 on workforce diversity should sensitize you to the general tendency for cross-cultural differences to exist. In a cross-cultural situation, caution dictates assuming that such differences exist until we are proven wrong. Remember, we have a tendency to project our own feelings and beliefs onto ambiguous targets (Chapter 3), leading us to ignore differences. Be particularly alert when dealing with good English speakers from cultures that emphasize harmony and avoidance of conflict (e.g., Japan). Their good English will tempt you to think that they think like you do, and their good manners will inhibit them from telling you otherwise.

Recognize Differences within Cultures. Appreciating differences between cultures can sometimes blind us to the differences among people within a culture. This, of course, is what stereotypes do (Chapter 3). Remember, your German subordinates will have as many different personalities, skills, and problems as your North American subordinates. Remember that there are occupational and social class differences in other countries just like there are at home, although they can be harder to decipher (this is why one of the authors once shook hands with the chef at a French business school, mistaking him for the dean!).

Watch Your Language (and Theirs). Unless the person with whom you are communicating is very fluent in English, speak particularly clearly, slowly, and simply. Avoid clichés, jargon, and slang. Consider how mystifying phrases such as "I'm all ears," "let's get rolling," and "so long" must be.⁵⁹ By the same token, do not assume that those who are facile in your language are smarter, more skilled, or more honest than those who are not.

Organizational Approaches to Improving Communication

In this section, we shall discuss some organizational techniques that can improve communication. We consider other techniques in Chapter 13 (with regard to conflict reduction) and Chapter 16 (with regard to organizational development).

360 Degree Feedback

Traditionally, employee performance appraisal has been viewed as an exercise in downward communication in which the boss tells the subordinate how he or she is doing. More recently, performance appraisal has become a two-way communication process in which subordinates are also able to have upward impact concerning their appraisal. Most recently, some firms have expanded the communication channels in performance appraisal to include not only superior and self-ratings but also ratings by subordinates, peers, and clients or customers. This is called *multisource* or

360 degree feedback. Firms that have tried it include Honeywell, Sprint, Amoco, and Burger King. At Nebraska's Midlands Community Hospital, patients are incorporated into the process when nurses receive feedback.⁶⁰

The 360 degree system usually focuses on required behavioural competencies rather than bottom-line performance. It is usually used for employee development rather than salary determination. It is possible that the various sources of feedback could contradict each other, and ratees may need some assistance in putting all this input together. However, in a well-designed 360 degree system, the various information sources ideally provide unique data about a person's performance. When supervisors receive performance ratings from multiple subordinates, it is called *upward feedback*. A recent study on upward feedback over a five-year period found that managers who were initially rated as poor or moderate showed significant improvements in feedback ratings, especially when the managers met with their employees to discuss their upward feedback.⁶¹

Employee Surveys and Survey Feedback

Surveys of the attitudes and opinions of current employees can provide a useful means of upward communication. Since surveys are usually conducted with questionnaires that provide for anonymous responses, employees should feel free to voice their genuine views. A good **employee survey** contains questions that reliably tap employee concerns and also provide information that is useful for practical purposes. Survey specialists must summarize (encode) results in a manner that is easily decoded by management. Surveys are especially useful when they are administered periodically. In this case, managers can detect changes in employee feelings that might deserve attention. As noted in our opening passage on Iams, survey results alerted management to communication problems in the company. The results of the survey ultimately led to the implementation of the quarterly communication meetings.

When survey results are fed back to employees, along with management responses and any plans for changes, this feedback should enhance downward communication. Survey feedback shows employees that management has heard and considered their comments. Plans for changes in response to survey concerns indicate a commitment to two-way communication.⁶²

Suggestion Systems and Query Systems

Suggestion systems are designed to enhance upward communication by soliciting ideas for improved work operations from employees. They represent a formal attempt to encourage useful ideas and prevent their filtering through the chain of command. The simplest example of a suggestion system involves the use of a suggestion box into which employees put written ideas for improvements (usually anonymously). This simple system is usually not very effective, since there is no tangible incentive for making a submission and no clear mechanism to show that management considered a submission.

Much better are programs that *reward* employees for suggestions that are actually adopted and provide feedback as to how management evaluated each suggestion. For simple suggestions a flat fee is usually paid (perhaps \$300). For complex suggestions of a technical nature that might result in substantial savings to the firm, a percentage of the anticipated savings is often awarded (perhaps several thousand dollars). An example of such a suggestion might be how to perform machinery maintenance without costly long-term shutdowns. When strong publicity follows the adopted suggestions (such as explaining them in the organization's employee newsletter), downward communication is also enhanced, since employees receive information about the kind of innovations desired. At Canada's RBC Financial Group, employees can receive up to \$25,000 for a suggestion, and around 550 a month are submitted.⁶³

360 degree feedback.

Performance appraisal that uses the input of supervisors, subordinates, peers, and clients or customers of the appraised individual.

Employee survey. Anonymous questionnaire that enables employees to state their candid opinions and attitudes about an organization and its practices.

Suggestion systems. Programs designed to enhance upward communication by soliciting ideas for improved work operations from employees.

Related to suggestion systems are *query systems* that provide a formal means of answering questions that employees may have about the organization. These systems foster two-way communication and are most effective when questions and answers are widely disseminated. Many organizations have a column of questions and answers in their employee newsletters, the content ranging from questions about benefits to the firm's stock performance.

An interesting type of query system is the anonymous letter. In fact, an increasing number of CEOs are actively soliciting employees' anonymous complaints. The president and chief executive of Browning-Ferris Industries Inc., invites employees to send him unsigned critical questions using an e-mail system that disguises the sender's identity. He then posts the replies on an electronic bulletin board. Anonymous letters have been instrumental in making changes at a number of companies.⁶⁴

Telephone Hotlines, TV Networks, and Intranets

Many organizations have adopted *telephone hotlines* to further communication. Some are actually query systems, in that employees can call in for answers to their questions. More common are hotlines that use a news format to present company information. News may be presented live at prearranged times or recorded for 24-hour availability. Such hotlines prove especially valuable at times of crisis, such as storms or strikes.⁶⁵ Companies are also using intranets, internal computer networks that can link employees throughout the organization, as a means of communicating important announcements. Intranets represent an important information source on various topics of interest to employees and can also allow employees to communicate information to the organization, such as changes of address or in benefits enrolment.⁶⁶

One fast-growing technique for promoting good communication is a company-owned television network, such as the one at Ford Motor Company.

More than 90 major companies in North America have their own TV satellites or cable networks, according to a survey from KJH Communications, an Atlanta consulting firm. The companies use TV for rumour control, to boost workers' involvement, to smooth operations in emergencies, and to cut millions of dollars in travel costs for training and new product briefings.

Ford began with just one monthly news program, but by 1989, it was broadcasting daily. Today, the daily Ford news program—which is broadcast each day at 10 a.m. and repeated throughout the day—is watched by 60 percent of blue-collar employees and 40 to 45 percent of white-collar employees, according to internal surveys.⁶⁷

Other prominent firms with their own TV networks include IBM, Federal Express, J.C. Penney, and DaimlerChrysler. DaimlerChrysler uses its system to train mechanics right at their own dealerships.

Management Training

Proper training can improve the communication skills of managers. Notice the specific use of the word *skills* here. Vague lectures about the importance of good communication simply do not tell managers *how* to communicate better. However, isolating specific communication skills and giving the boss an opportunity to practice these skills should have positive effects. The manager who has confidence in how to handle delicate matters should be better able to handle the balance between social-emotional and task demands.

Effective training programs often present videotaped models correctly handling a typical communication problem. Managers then role-play the problem and are reinforced by the trainers when they exhibit effective skills. At General Electric, for example, typical communication problems that this kind of training addresses have

included discussing undesirable work habits, reviewing work performance, discussing salary changes, and dealing with subordinate-initiated discussions.⁶⁸ North Carolina's Center for Creative Leadership incorporates 360 degree feedback data from peers, superiors, and subordinates into its training.

It might seem that training of this nature is essentially focused on downward communication. However, the disclosure of one's attitudes and feelings promotes reciprocity on the part of the receiver.⁶⁹ Thus, the manager who can communicate effectively downward can expect increased upward communication in return.

the manager's Notebook

Four Seasons Goes to Paris

1. While Four Seasons encourages strict adherence to its core values, it allows the management and employees of each hotel to be true to their national culture. As such, Four Seasons takes a "when in Rome ..." approach to the hotel business. Not every country has the same social conventions, or the same idea of what is considered polite and proper etiquette. Four Seasons goes out of its way to ensure that its hotels communicate fundamental values to staff and guests, but in a way that allows employees to have discretion at the local level. To underline this point, Four Seasons trimmed its written operating standards from 800 to 270 in order to allow greater discretion at the local level when dealing with different social conventions across cultures. As such, an Italian employee in Italy or an Egyptian employee in Egypt would be free to behave in a manner and provide service in a way that is congruent with their national identities. Four Seasons' cultural sensitivity extends to human resource practices, such as performance evaluations, that are not common in Europe and the Middle East. Managers are free to modify human resource forms and procedures to respect local customs and traditions.
2. Four Seasons managers noted that, in France, words were not enough to communicate values, and that French employees take a wait-and-see approach before jumping on board. As such, how the values were presented to employees and enacted by managers were key parts of the

communication process. In addition to the presentation style, some concrete communication tactics were also used. A 35-person task force was assembled to help people understand how the company does things, to listen for problems, and to control the rumour mill. In an attempt to diffuse the traditional labour tensions in France, Le Calvez took the representatives of the various unions to lunch so that important conversations could take place face-to-face in an inclusive manner. The company also carefully explained the use of procedures such as employee evaluations, and framed them as opportunities for open and constructive dialogue. Furthermore, to promote communication and problem solving, Four Seasons implemented a "direct line" process in which, once a month, the general manager would meet with employees, supervisors, and managers in groups of 30. Finally, Le Calvez and his team carefully cultivated culturally sensitive external communications with the press. So what was the outcome? Responses from employee surveys have been extremely positive, clearly showing that employees have bought into the culture. Furthermore, the hotel received several industry awards since Four Seasons took control. Overall, through intelligent communication tactics and cultural sensitivity, Four Seasons was able to maintain the standards of excellence at the George V and to make believers of employees and the public alike.

Learning Objectives Checklist

1. *Communication* is the process by which information is exchanged between a sender and a receiver. Effective communication involves getting the right information to the right people in a timely manner. Although much routine communication can occur via the chain of command, the chain tends to be slow and prone to filtering. It also ignores informal communication.
2. Manager–employee communication is frequently ineffective. The manager might have difficulty balancing task and social-emotional demands, and both parties might be reluctant to inform each other of bad news (the mum effect).
3. The *grapevine* is the organization's informal communication network. Only a portion of people who receive grapevine information pass it on. Key physical locations or jobs that require movement around the organization encourage certain members to pass on information. The grapevine can be useful to the organization, and it often transmits information accurately. However, it becomes problematic when rumours (unverified beliefs) circulate.
4. Verbal language that is tailored to the needs of a particular occupation or organization is known as *jargon*. While jargon aids communication between experienced co-workers, it can often prove confusing for new organizational members and people outside the organization. *Nonverbal communication* is the transmission of messages by a medium other than speech or writing. One major form is *body language*, which involves body movement or the placement of the body in relation to the receiver. Much body language is subtle and automatic, communicating factors such as liking, interest, and status differences. Other forms of nonverbal communication involve office decoration, office arrangement, and the clothing worn at work.
5. Differences in communication styles between men and women have their origin in childhood but persist in the workplace, where they can influence the way men and women are perceived and treated.
6. Communication across cultures can be difficult owing to obvious language differences but also to less obvious differences in nonverbal style, social conventions, and matters of etiquette. In low-context cultures, individuals can interpret messages more literally than in high-context cultures, where issues surrounding a message are more critical to understanding it. When communicating cross-culturally, assume cultural differences until you know otherwise, recognize differences within cultures, and use simple language.
7. *Computer-mediated communication* is communication that relies on computer technology to facilitate information exchange. Examples include e-mail, chat systems, tele-conferencing, and videoconferencing. Computer-mediated communication is useful for disseminating routine messages and soliciting ideas, but richer (e.g., face-to-face) communication media are superior for non-routine decision tasks and messages.
8. Personal approaches to improving communication include taking time, being accepting of others, concentrating on the problem, saying what you feel, listening actively, and giving timely and specific feedback. Organizational approaches to improving communication include 360 degree feedback, employee surveys, suggestion and query systems, hotlines, TV networks and intranets, and management training.

Discussion Questions

1. Using Exhibit 10.1 as a guide, describe a communication episode that you have observed in an organization. Who were the sender and receiver? Was the episode effective? Why or why not?
2. Debate: Since more and more global business is being conducted in English, North Americans will not have cross-cultural communication problems in the future.
3. Why is computer-mediated communication attractive? What are its problems?
4. "It is very difficult to establish good manager–employee communication." Why?
5. Discuss the pros and cons of the existence of the grapevine in organizations. Suppose an organization wanted to "kill" the grapevine. How easy do you think this would be?

6. Discuss a case in which you heard one message communicated verbally and “saw” another transmitted nonverbally. What was the content of each message? Which one did you believe?
7. Under what conditions might body language or clothing have a strong communicative effect? When might the effect be weaker?
8. Debate: As more women move into management positions in organizations, the gender differences in communication between men and women will eventually disappear and so will communication problems.

Integrative Discussion Questions

1. What role do perceptions play in gender differences in communication? Refer to the perceptual system in Chapter 3 and use its components to explain how differences in communication styles between men and women can result in misunderstandings and inaccurate perceptions. What effect might these misunderstandings and inaccurate perceptions have on gender stereotypes?
2. How does a manager’s leadership style affect manager–employee communication? Refer to the theories of leadership described in Chapter 9 (e.g., leadership traits, behaviours, situational theories, participative leadership, developmental leadership, and LMX theory) and explain their implications for effective manager–employee communication.

Experiential Exercise

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Case Incident

The “Philanderer”

Phil is manager of a small division of an international construction company. At one point, Phil was trying to get in touch with a client to advise him that he would be late getting to the site, but he was unable to get through on his client's cell phone. Alternatively, Phil called his own secretary, Carol, and asked her to call the client's office so that they would relay a message to the client, advising him that Phil would be a bit late. Carol called the client's office and left Phil's message.

When Phil got to the construction site, the client was not there. One of the construction workers indicated that the client had been there earlier, had waited awhile, looked at his watch and left. Phil then drove to the client's office and found that the client had not received the message that he would be late. Suspecting that Carol had neglected to relay the message, Phil apologised to his client, but said nothing to Carol.

Four months later, Carol and Phil sat down together for her annual performance review and Phil indicated that he was terribly disappointed in Carol since she had not been very good at relaying messages, as he requested. He pointed out the incident where his client had not been at the construction site since he had not received the message that Phil would be late. Livid, Carol insisted that she had relayed the message and asked Phil why he didn't tell her about this problem at the time it occurred. Phil shrugged his shoulders and looked away.

Source: Prepared by Nicole Bérubé. Used with permission.

1. Why did Phil wait until the performance review to raise the miscommunication problem with Carol?
2. If you were Phil, what would you do now?

Case Study

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